

Analysis of Reading Forms in the "Reading across Curriculum" Initiative in Hong Kong: Insights from Two Key Curriculum Documents



Ziyi Feng^{1,*}

¹ *Guangdong University of Education, China*

Abstract: The "Reading across Curriculum" initiative implemented in Hong Kong emphasizes interdisciplinary reading instruction and the development of students' thinking abilities. By classifying disciplinary knowledge and analyzing the role of Chinese language use, this study identifies three forms of reading within Chinese interdisciplinary contexts: Chinese subject reading, reading in other disciplines, and non-textual reading. Reading in other disciplines compensates for the limitations of Chinese reading in knowledge acquisition, enabling students to acquire multidisciplinary and comprehensive knowledge while providing a domain for language application and transfer. Non-textual reading addresses the perceptual and experiential constraints of textual reading, allowing students to gain direct, observable experiences through reading activities while deepening their understanding of language as a medium of expression.

Keywords: interdisciplinary reading, reading forms, reading across curriculum, Hong Kong education

1. Introduction

Interdisciplinary teaching represents a pivotal direction in international basic education curriculum reform. As the medium of mother tongue education, Chinese language teaching faces unique challenges in implementing interdisciplinary instruction. *China's Compulsory Education Chinese Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)* explicitly incorporates "interdisciplinary learning" as a component of Chinese language courses (Ministry of Education of China, 2022), requiring Chinese language teachers to engage in cross-disciplinary teaching.

Current research on interdisciplinary Chinese teaching often adopts a reading-centered perspective. Scholars such as Wen Xiaojun and Xu Zhaohui have developed a framework for an interdisciplinary Chinese reading system (Wen & Xu, 2023), while Liu Hua and Shen Bin argue that Chinese teachers should "cross boundaries" in teaching reading and writing, just as teachers of other subjects should integrate literacy instruction into their disciplines

(Liu & Shen, 2022). Wen Xiaojun further refines the concept of reading patterns, proposing that integrated reading encompasses three forms: Chinese language-specific reading, interdisciplinary reading, and cross-disciplinary reading (Wen, 2023). While these studies highlight the systematic nature of Chinese interdisciplinary reading and its distinction from reading in other subjects, they lack a typological analysis grounded in the application of Chinese language.

Hong Kong places strong emphasis on cultivating students' reading literacy. Hong Kong primary school students have consistently ranked among the top three globally in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) for four consecutive cycles. According to curriculum reform assessment documents released by the Hong Kong Education Bureau, this success is attributed to the "Reading to Learn" initiative (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2015), which aims to develop students' ability to learn through reading and thereby

Corresponding Author: Ziyi Feng
Guangdong University of Education, China

©The Author(s) 2026. Published by BONI FUTURE DIGITAL PUBLISHING CO., LIMITED This is an open access article under the CC BY License(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

"learn to learn." A current focus within this initiative is the promotion of "Reading across Curriculum" (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2023), guided by the philosophy of cultivating students as "efficient readers who understand independent reading and lifelong learning through cross-curricular approaches" (Hong Kong Education Bureau Curriculum Development Council Language Section, 2021). Hong Kong's "Reading across Curriculum" includes two models: "subject-based reading" and "interdisciplinary reading." The theoretical and practical experiences from Hong Kong offer valuable insights for addressing challenges in teaching interdisciplinary reading in Chinese.

In this context, this paper analyzes two key documents released by the Hong Kong Education Bureau: *Linking Learning with Critical Thinking: Cross-Curricular Reading Resources (Theoretical Guide)* and *Linking Learning with Critical Thinking: Cross-Curricular Reading Resources (Practical Guide)*. By conducting a typological analysis of cross-curricular reading from the perspective of Chinese language use, this study aims to clarify the focal points for categorizing interdisciplinary reading instruction and propose new perspectives for overcoming existing challenges.

2. Key Components of Hong Kong's "Reading across Curriculum"

2.1 Three forms of reading

Hong Kong's "Reading across Curriculum" encompasses two models: "subject-based reading" and "interdisciplinary reading." The former involves "all subject teachers instructing students in reading within their respective disciplines, challenging the traditional notion that reading is solely the responsibility of Chinese language teachers" (Hong Kong Education Bureau Curriculum Development Council Language Section, 2021). The latter refers to "teachers from different subjects identifying common learning themes, selecting appropriate reading materials, setting reading objectives, organizing reading and related learning activities, and collaborating to provide interdisciplinary reading guidance". (Hong Kong Education Bureau Curriculum Development Council Language Section,

2021) This study focuses primarily on the "interdisciplinary reading" model. Using Chinese reading as a benchmark, a typological analysis based on disciplinary knowledge and the application of Chinese language reveals three coexisting forms: Chinese subject reading, reading in other disciplines, and non-textual reading.

2.1.1 Chinese subject reading

Chinese subject reading involves students engaging with linguistic and textual materials under teacher guidance to develop Chinese language learning abilities. For example, a sixth-grade interdisciplinary reading unit on "scientific exploration" integrated Chinese language, General Studies, and Library Science. Over 11 lessons, the Chinese curriculum implemented reading instruction focused on: "understanding content summaries, summarizing paragraphs, and identifying main ideas; comprehending information from digital and media sources; reviewing features of expository texts, including metaphorical and illustrative examples; and applying appropriate reading strategies to diverse materials" (Hong Kong Education Bureau Curriculum Development Council Language Section, 2023). *The Chinese Language Education Curriculum Guide (Primary 1–6)* states that Chinese reading objectives include "cultivating comprehension, analysis, appreciation, and critical evaluation skills; mastering reading strategies; and fostering reading interest, diligence, and breadth" (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2017). These objectives align with traditional Chinese reading formats.

2.1.2 Reading in other disciplines

Reading in other disciplines involves teachers guiding students in subject-specific reading to develop learning abilities in those areas. For instance, a fourth-grade unit on "Imagination and Creativity" integrated Chinese, Mathematics, and Library Science. Mathematics activities included reading story texts and assembling tangram shapes, with objectives such as "understanding plot content, learning from protagonists' creativity and wit; observing shapes and making associations; and identifying names of tangram pieces" (Hong Kong Education Bureau Curriculum Development Council Language Section, 2023). *The Mathematics*

Curriculum Guide (Primary 1–6) specifies that fourth-grade learning objectives in shapes and space include "understanding concepts and properties of rhombuses and circles; recognizing inclusion relationships among quadrilaterals" (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2017). This illustrates mathematical reading, which, from a Chinese perspective, constitutes reading in other disciplines.

2.1.3 Non-Textual reading

Non-textual reading involves students engaging with non-linguistic information carriers, such as images and symbols, under teacher guidance to develop perceptual, recognition, and comprehension abilities. For example, in the "Imagination and Creativity" unit, the wordless picture book *Journey* was used. It tells the story of a protagonist who draws a door with a red brush and embarks on a

magical adventure. In the first Chinese lesson, teachers and students collaboratively examined page 4 of the book, observing the protagonist's expressions and actions and discussing reasons and emotions behind the character's solitude (Hong Kong Education Bureau Curriculum Development Council Language Section, 2023). Since the book contains no text, this constitutes non-textual reading.

2.2 The role of non-chinese reading forms in enhancing chinese reading

Within Hong Kong's "interdisciplinary reading" model, the three reading forms coexist, interact, and complement one another (see Figure 1). Although Chinese subject reading is not the sole focus, from the perspective of Chinese language education, the other two forms significantly enhance the quality and effectiveness of reading instruction.

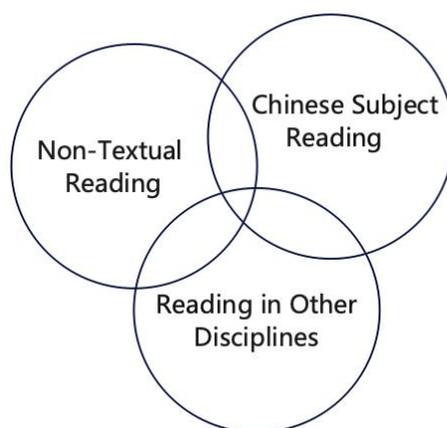


Figure 1: Three Forms of Reading

2.2.1 Reading in other disciplines

Reading in other disciplines positively influences Chinese subject reading. It compensates for the limitations of Chinese reading in knowledge acquisition, helping students gain multidisciplinary and comprehensive knowledge. It also provides a context for language application and transfer, allowing reading literacy developed in Chinese classes to be applied in other subjects, thereby strengthening overall reading competence. For example, a fifth-grade unit on "Living in the Information Age" integrated Chinese, General Studies, and Reading. The first lesson focused on recognizing layout features and reading methods of newspaper articles, emphasizing objectivity and

factual accuracy. In subsequent lessons, Chinese teachers guided students through the storybook *Super Popular News Competition*, helping them grasp main ideas, central themes, and evaluate characters. Later, General Studies teachers used materials from both Reading and Chinese classes to analyze content, focus, and perspectives in different newspaper reports on the same event (Hong Kong Education Bureau Curriculum Development Council Language Section, 2023). Library materials complemented Chinese studies, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of news texts. Meanwhile, reading strategies learned in Chinese classes were applied in General Studies, deepening students' thematic understanding and language application.

2.2.2 Non-Textual reading

Non-textual reading also plays a positive role in Chinese subject reading. It addresses the perceptual and experiential limitations of textual reading, allowing students to acquire direct, observable experiences through reading activities. It also deepens language comprehension by enabling cross-verification between indirect knowledge from texts and direct experience from non-textual sources. For instance, in a fourth-grade class using wordless picture books, Chinese teachers guided students to interpret characters' emotions and thoughts through visual details, speculate on narrative developments, and engage in dramatic activities such as dialogue design and role-playing (Hong Kong Education Bureau Curriculum Development Council Language Section, 2023). The visual details in wordless picture books compensate for the abstract nature of language, directly presenting images that focus students' visual thinking and prevent excessive divergence, which is especially beneficial for younger learners. This approach also creates opportunities for language exploration: vibrant colors, dynamic lines, and expressive characters provide rich material for deep thinking. When students engage in drama activities based on wordless books, they integrate visual narratives with textual interpretation, crafting dialogues and analyzing others' lines to create authentic performances. This process enhances their understanding of how language expresses human experiences, events, and objects, ultimately improving communicative competence.

3. Conclusion

The "Reading across Curriculum" initiative in Hong Kong emphasizes interdisciplinary reading instruction and the cultivation of students' thinking abilities. Through disciplinary knowledge categorization and analysis of Chinese language application, this study identifies three forms of Chinese cross-curricular reading: Chinese subject reading, reading in other disciplines, and non-textual reading. Reading in other disciplines compensates for the knowledge acquisition limitations of Chinese reading, helping students gain multidisciplinary and comprehensive knowledge while providing a domain

for language application and transfer. Non-textual reading addresses the perceptual and experiential limitations of Chinese reading, enabling students to acquire direct, observable experiences through reading activities while deepening their understanding of language as an expressive medium.

Explanatory Notes

1. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), organized by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), is a global assessment conducted every five years to monitor trends in children's reading literacy.

2. PIRLS 2021 data are sourced from the Chinese Language Education Research Centre, Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong: <https://www.cacler.hku.hk/cn/events/events/pirls-2021-press-conference>.

3. In Hong Kong, language education is divided into Chinese Language Education and English Language Education. In mainland China, the term "language education" invariably refers to education in the Chinese language.

Acknowledgement

This research was supported by the following research and teaching reform projects:

1. Key Research Base of Humanities and Social Sciences in Guangdong Provincial Colleges and Universities "Mother Language Education and Research Base of Guangdong University of Education" (Grant No. 2022WZJD007);

2. Research and Innovation Team in Chinese Language Education for the New Era at Guangdong University of Education (Grant No. 2024KYCXTD012);

3. 2024 Guangdong Provincial Undergraduate University Teaching Quality and Teaching Reform Project "Virtual Teaching and Research Center for Innovative Practice in Chinese Language Education: Greater Bay Area Integration of Primary, Secondary, and Higher Education" (Guangdong Higher Education Letter No. [2024] 30);

4. 2025 Guangdong University of Education University-Level Teaching Quality and Teaching

Reform Project "Research on Teaching Reform in the Integration of Curriculum Ideology and Politics into Subject Pedagogy Courses: A Case Study of Secondary Chinese Language Teaching Design" (Guangdong University of Education Teaching Character No. [2025] 120).

Generative artificial intelligence (Deepseek) was utilized as a translation aid during the preparation of this manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest to this work.

References

- Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. Education Bureau. (2015). *Report on the new academic structure medium-term review and beyond: Continual refinement and progression*. Retrieved from https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/tc/curriculum-development/curriculum-docs-reports/MTR_Report_c.pdf
- Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. Education Bureau. (2017). *Chinese language education curriculum guide (Primary 1 - Secondary 6)*. Author.
- Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. Education Bureau. (2017). *Mathematics education curriculum guide (Primary 1 - Secondary 6)*. Author.
- Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. Education Bureau. (2021). *Linking learning with critical thinking: Cross-curricular reading resources (Theoretical guide)*. Author.
- Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. Education Bureau. (2023). *Linking learning with critical thinking: Cross-curricular reading resources (Practical guide)*. Author.
- Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. Education Bureau. (2023). *Primary education*. Retrieved from <https://www.edb.gov.hk/sc/edu-system/primary-secondary/primary/index.html>
- Liu, H., & Shen, B. (2022). A multidimensional exploration of the "Chinese language nature" in cross-disciplinary Chinese language learning. *Chinese Language Construction*, 2022(19), 10 - 14.
- Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (2022). *Compulsory education Chinese curriculum standards (2022 edition)*. Beijing Normal University Press.
- Wen, X. (2023). The construction of reading patterns from an integrated perspective: Also on the implementation of current reading tasks. *Journal of Educational Development*, 2023(05), 38 - 43.
- Wen, X., & Xu, Z. (2023). The construction of cross-disciplinary reading in Chinese language under the background of the compulsory education Chinese curriculum standards (2022 edition). *Curriculum and Teaching Research*, 2023(03), 81 - 87.

How to Cite: Feng, Z. (2026). Analysis of Reading Forms in the "Reading across Curriculum" Initiative in Hong Kong: Insights from Two Key Curriculum Documents. *Journal of Global Humanities and Social Sciences*, 7(1), 1-5
<https://doi.org/10.61360/BoniGHSS262019030101>